

Coffea arabica – Coffee Bush

Coffea arabica, commonly known as the Coffee bush, is an attractive shrubby evergreen to 5m in height. Despite its name, *C. arabica* originated in Ethiopia, where it grows at elevations between 1,375 to 1,830m. It is believed to have been introduced into Arabia prior to the 15th century.

It was first planted in Java in 1690, and in the early 18th century was carried to Surinam, Martinique, and Jamaica. Cultivation soon spread throughout the West Indies and Central America and favorable regions of South America. Later, it reached India and Sri Lanka and today, nearly 90% of the world's coffee comes from this species!

Technically it is an evergreen, glabrous shrub or small tree, up to 5m tall when unpruned. The leaves opposite, dark green, glossy, elliptical, acuminate-tipped, short-petioled, 5-20cm long, 1.5-7.5cm broad, usually 10-15cm long and 6cm broad. Flowers are 1cm in length, white, fragrant and borne in axillary clusters in the summer. Fruit is a drupe, about 1.5cm long, oval-elliptic, green when immature, ripening yellow and then crimson, finally turning black upon drying.

Coffea arabica is suitable for tropical to warm temperature climates and grows best in rich, fertile, moist but free draining soils in a warm sunny position in climates where the temperatures do not fall below 5°C but it can be grown as an indoor foliage plant to 75cm in cooler climates. It will grow to some 5m in height and 2m in width but is normally pruned to a height of 2.5m.

Propagation

Propagation is from fresh seed that germinates readily without pre-treatment other than soaking for several hours prior to sowing. After soaking removal of the stiff outer casing (endocarp) before sowing can assist germination but is not essential.

Sow seed to a depth of 5mm in a good quality potting mix, keep moist but not damp. Seed germinates best at a temperature of 22°C+. Germination of coffee seeds takes from 8 to 14 weeks depending upon temperature and the length of time seed has been stored. Seeds stored at 10°C remain viable for up to 12 months although there will be some deterioration in % germination over time so seed is best sown at the earliest opportunity.

Prick young seedlings out into individual pots at 10cm and grow on. Protect young plants from frost and plant out at a minimum height of 30cm in their final position after the danger of frost has passed.